HELDA
HELSINGIN YLIOPISTO
HELSINGFORS UNIVERSITET
UNIVERSITY OF HELSINKI

UNIVERSITY OF HELSINKI

https://helda.helsinki.fi

# A Blended Learning Course as a Context to Support the Democratic Expression of the Self

Loperfido, Fedela Feldia

2017

Loperfido , F F & Ritella , G 2017 , ' A Blended Learning Course as a Context to Support the Democratic Expression of the Self ' , Civitas educationis : Education, Politics and Culture , vol. 6 , no. 1 , pp. 37-50 . < https://universitypress.unisob.na.it/ojs/index.php/civitaseducationis/article/view/460 >

http://hdl.handle.net/10138/310183

acceptedVersion

*Downloaded from Helda, University of Helsinki institutional repository.*

*This is an electronic reprint of the original article.*

*This reprint may differ from the original in pagination and typographic detail.*

*Please cite the original version.*

Draft for self-archiving: Loperfido, F. F., & Ritella, G. (2017). A Blended Learning Course as a Context to Support the Democratic Expression of the Self. *Civitas educationis. Education, Politics, and Culture*, *6*(1), 37-50.

***Abstract***

*In this article, we use a dialogical approach to discuss the relation- ship between learning and democracy. In particular, we conceptualize the democratic aspects of the Self based on the Bakhtinian theory of Magistral, Socratic and Menippean dialogues, and on Herman's con- ceptualization of the dialogical self. Using these theoretical resources, we aim at building a framework that allows to examine the emergence of democratic selves from learning interaction. In particular, we explore how the three forms of dialogue characterize the Self during a blended course and how students move from Magistral power identity positions to Menippean dialogues. We interpret these movements as revealing the emergence of a democratic expression of the Self.*

***Keywords:*** *blended learning; dialogical self; democratic education.*

## 1. Dialogical Self Theory to approach the democratic structure of the Self

In this article, we use a dialogical approach to discuss the relationship between learning and democracy. In particular, we conceptualize the dem- ocratic aspects of the Self based on the Bakhtinian theory of Magistral, Socratic and Menippean dialogues, and on Herman's conceptualization of the dialogical Self. Using these theoretical resources, we aim at building a framework that allows us to examine the emergence of democratic selves from learning interaction. We start the discussion by outlining the concep- tualization of the Self by Hermans and the dialogical theory of Bakhtin that we use for our argumentation in this article. In the second part of the article, we will use some excerpts of student's dialogue to illustrate our arguments and discuss the link between democratic self-expression and learning activities based on the Blended Collaborative and Constructive Participation (BCCP) model. Which is a model for arranging collaborative learning activities that integrate the online and the offline.

In our view, Dialogical Self Theory (Hermans, 2002) represents a theo- retical approach that can efficaciously explain the dynamicity of the Self and, especially, how social power components contribute to its formation. The theory originates from the assumptions of James (1890) and from the philosophical approach of Bakhtin (1986). Indeed, on the one hand, James proposed the distinction between *I* and *Me*, claiming that the *I* is the Self as-knower whereas the *Me* is equated to the Self as-known and is characterized by what can be called the empirical Self, the elements that are perceived as belonging to oneself. On the other hand, Bakhtin (1984) affirms that consciousness is a voiced internal dialogue and "emphasizes that individuals situate (position) and feel themselves in relation to others in the very act of communicating with others" (Garvey & Fogel, 2007: 55- 57). Furthermore,

> it is important to note that Bakhtin's philosophy of dialogue has not to be simplified to analyses of interpersonal discourse. Dialogue represents a worldview in which one's existence, one's sense of Selfhood, is not divorced from the experiences of being with others […] Self development is con- ceived as an active and continuous process of co-being. (*Ibidem*)

By referring to such approaches, Dialogical Self Theory pays attention to both of the multiple and polyphonic presence of several I-positions and the unity of the Self. Indeed, a dynamic multiplicity of I-positions features the Self and the *I* can move from one spatial position to another according to space-time changes (Hermans, 2001; 2002; Hermans & Kempen, 1993).

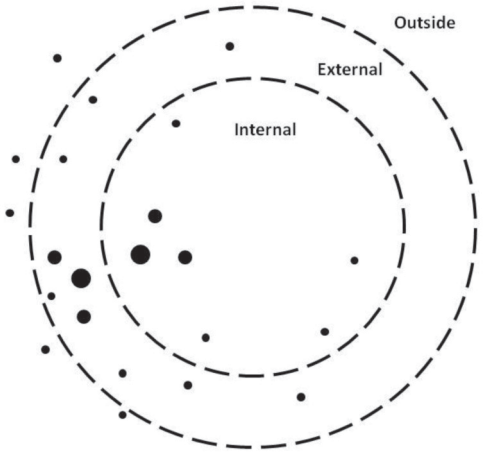
> The *I* fluctuates among different and even opposed positions, and has the capacity imaginatively to endow each position with a voice, so that dialogi- cal relations between positions can be established. (Hermans, 2002: 148)

Thus, the Self is theorized as continuously unfolding, modifying itself in respect to the situational features; in a flexible, dynamic and negotiated process (Adams & Markus, 2001).

The Dialogical Self (Hermans, 2001) can be represented by several con- centric circles within which internal and external I-positions enter in rela- tionships with each other (Figure 1).

As argued thus far, the Self is shaped by a multiplicity of I-positions, endowed with dialogically related voices. Thus, the Self is conceived as a multivoiced unity within which a polyphony of voices occurs. The voices are similar to the characters of a novel, interacting with each other in a process of negotiation, disagreement, and reciprocal comparison. The in- ternal positions are perceived as a part of myself, instead of the external positions that are felt as part of the environment. A person can perceive himself or herself as a teacher, a friend, an employer, and so on, but will feel also a number of external positions, such as, you as my student, my friend, my boss. What is relevant is the mutual relationship between internal and

Figure 1. Positions in a multivoiced Self (adaptated from Hermans, 2001: 253)




external I-positions unfolding over time, since the external ones refer to objects, people, activities that lie in the context surrounding a person and that is relevant for the definition of his or her internal I-positions. In short, they are important from the point of view of one or more internal posi- tions. Vice versa, the internal positions receive their importance because of their relationships with external positions. The significance of the time- space dimension—defined by Bakhtin (1984) as "chronotope"—is evident in the intrinsic necessity of the Self to position itself in an imaginary or real space, in the mutual transaction between internal and external I-positions over time, and in its process of extension to the environment. However, the specific and imminent significant time-space is not the only chronotope shaping the structure of the Self. Many chronotopes are interconnected in the perception of what we are and, in turn, they are interrelated with sev- eral multivoiced internal, external and outside positions. So, the structure of the Self reflects the dynamics of society. Indeed,

> as some individuals or groups in a society have more social power or influ- ence than other individuals and groups, the voices of some positions in the Self are more easily heard and have, in a particular situation, more opportu- nity for expression and communication than others. (Hermans, 2002: 148)

The next issue we will tackle concerns the power relationships among voices and how they relate to the emergence of democratic aspects of the Self. We claim that the Bakhtinian concepts of Magistral, Socratic, and Me- nippean dialogue can be useful to depict and understand such relationships. We refer here to the conceptualization of first, second, and third voice. The first one is the voice of the author, which is addressed to a second person and involves a third ideological-cultural and authoritarian voice. The dif-

ferent power relations among these voices for Bakhtin shape three types of dialogue: Magistral, Socratic, and Menippean. The Magistral dialogue is underpinned by an asymmetry of interlocutors due to an asymmetry of power and cultural/technical knowledge. In the Magistral dialogue there is a superiority of the first voice over the second, of the Magistral over the novitiate. However, the cornerstone for the maintenance of this asymmetry is the presence of a third party, being an authoritative and institutional voice upon which the first voice may sketch. Bakhtin (1986: 88) notes: "There are always authoritative utterances that set the tone—artistic, sci- entific, and journalistic works on which one relies, to which one refers, which are cited, imitated, and followed." In a learning experience at school, the teacher usually embodies the first-authoritative voice and the child en- acts a second voice cowed to the first one. Furthermore, the institutional voice of the culture, books, science, and so forth enters in the discourse, as it is interpreted by the first voice. "The Magistral discussion centers itself on a deficit or an absence (*quaestio*) on the part of the second voice (par- ent/teacher/mentor/tutor) that interprets (*interpretatio*) the third voice in the given situation" (Jauss, 1989, as cited in Cheyne & Tarulli, 1999: 18). So, the first and the third voices lead the discourse of the second one to- ward what is considered a proper end and a correct meaning. In addition, a *telos*, a goal, is given (explicitly or not) by the third voice and guides the whole Magistral dialogue. The teacher (to stay in the above example) and the third voice presume to know the direction that the dialogue with, and of, the child, is going, and try to direct it by notes and corrections. It can be argued that this type of dialogue is typical in situation when responsibil- ity is concentrated on the teacher—or the adult more in general —and the child is not able to a more central role in negotiating meaning.

As the child becomes more skilled at negotiating meaning (Bruner, 1986) and acquires a more active role in the relationship with the adult, the Mag- istral dialogue can turn in a Socratic Dialogue. Two characteristics feature such a dialogue: it dodges the *telos* of the third voice and is suspicious of consensus. Indeed, every dialogue is open-ended and every voice within that dialogue (even the third voice) can be questioned, denied, and chal- lenged. The child can "rework and re-accentuate" (Bakhtin, 1986: 89) them and his/her second voice does not appear silenced anymore. In this case, the adult's voice becomes confused "until it finally produces a meaning that is the result of a mutual inquiry, and that emerges out of a knowledge of one's lack of knowledge" (Jauss, 1989: 210). An increasing mutuality of *questiones* and *interpretationes* emerges in the dialogue, where more active and directed questions come from the second voice and the role of the adult can be modified (Cheyne & Tarulli, 1999). Indeed, both inter- pretation of the second voice by the first one and the authoritativeness of the third voice itself can be questioned (Lyotard, 1984). By following this escalating conflict among voices, a Menippean dialogue can occur. Its main characteristic is the switching from a satirical and unofficial aspect of the Socratic dialogue to the mocking and cynical dialogue, which easily leads

to the rejection of the third voice. Carnivalesque and grotesque forms of dialogue can appear, jeering and getting sworn at the third and the second voice (Bakhtin, 1986).

We maintain, first, that each I-position is defined by participation in Magistral, Socratic or/and Menippean dialogues, which imply typical power relationships among voices. Second, we affirm that, when the struc- ture of the Self is characterized by movement between different forms of dialogue, consciousness can be in some way expanded. We maintain that the construction of personal positions involving a critical approach to the third voice, and so to the claimed authority of the first voice, can guarantee the distribution of power and the process that we call 'Self Democratic Expression'.

We claim that such democratic expression of the self is crucial within so- cieties that value the participation of citizens to the democratic process and more generally in the life of the society. In many policy documents in the European Union there is a strong emphasis on encouraging the democratic and civic participation of citizens and stimulating interest and involvement in policy making (e.g., Council of the European Union, 2014). Reaching the aim of a full participation of citizens to the democratic life of society, from our perspective, involves such a process of dynamically constructing personal positition through a Self Democratic Expression.

Furthermore, participatory approaches to learning, such as the Knowl- edge Building approach (Scardamalia & Bereiter, 2006) and the dialogical approach (Hermans, 2002), can transform classrooms into "laboratories of culture" (Bruner, 1996) where students experiment new sets of posi- tions and further develop their Selves in terms of democratic participation. For example, in Knowledge Building, the students are recognized as active agents who collectively share responsibility for the construction of knowl- edge. Thus, knowledge is conceptualized as the result of democratic pro- cesses of negotiation rather than as a given reality that the students should accept passively. The expectation is that such a democratic understanding of knowledge as result of collective efforts, once appropriated by students, becomes 'pervasive' and is applied also to other domains of the students' lives, becoming integral part of their Selves. Accordingly, we believe that education has a great responsibility in giving the students opportunities to develop their Selves in this direction. In the following section, we describe a model of learning—inspired by Knowledge Building and dialogical peda- gogy—which favor the formation of a democratic expression of the Self. After describing the Blended Collaborative and Constructive Participation (BCCP) model (Ligorio & Cucchiara, 2011) we analyze how the dialogical Self structure of students is defined through the participation in a context where this model was implemented. In particular, we qualitatively analyze some excerpts from students' discourse to exemplify our theorization of democratic expression of Selves, showing how it emerged from participa- tion in this context of learning.

## 2. The Blended Collaborative and Constructive Participation Model

The Blended Collaborative and Constructive Participation (BCCP) model (Ligorio & Cucchiara, 2011) has been developed at the University of Bari (IT) and refers to Cultural Historical Psychology (Vygotsky, 1978), Knowl- edge Building Theory (Scardamalia, 2002) and Dialogical Self Theory (Her- mans, 2002). The model combines both offline and online learning activities, since previous research (Koschmann, 1999; Ligorio, 2011; Renshaw, 2004; Wegerif, 2006) has established that technological mediation can support dialogical processes. Blended educational activities, which combine the use of online communication and face-to-face interaction, are interesting oc- casions for dialogical learning to occur. The online activities proposed by the model are implemented on Synergeia (bscl.fit.fraunhofer.de), a freeware educational platform designed to enhance collaborative knowledge building. The offline activities are delivered in a university lecture room. BCCP model, as described here, was applied to two blended learning courses held at the University of Bari (IT) (2008-09 and 2009-10 academic year, 52 burgeoning psychologists). Each course lasted three months and was divided in six mod- ules, covering the content of a course on E-learning. During each module, individual, group, and plenary activities were arranged.

The structure of this course was truly innovative considering the general context of the university within which the course was offered. Indeed, this was the only course delivered in this mode; all the other courses of this university were delivered in a traditional face-to-face mode.

## 3. The research (aims, data collection and method of analysis)

The excerpt that we discuss below are extracted from an investigation aimed at exploring the power relationships among voices within the Self. We conducted eight focus group discussions about learning and identi- ty (totally, eight focus group discussion, four at the beginning and four at the end of the courses). We used Dialogical discourse analysis (DDA) (Wortham, 2001) to grasp three forms of dialogue in the structure of the Self, paying special attention to the power relationships among voices. DDA looks at both narrated and storytelling events, as people can say something about themselves (narrated event) and, at the same time, enact at an interactional level what they are saying (storytelling event). DDA combines both pragmatic and interpretative levels of analysis and follows two steps; in this study two researchers first performed each step of analy- sis independently, later they compared and discussed the analysis involving a third researcher in case of divergence (about 15%).

The first step consist of reading the whole text to have a global view of the utterances context and to detect indexical cues (references and predi-

cation, metapragmatic descriptors, quotations, evaluative indexicals, and epistemic modalization). At this step of analysis, we paid attention to the emergence of the three voices theorized by Bakhtin and included in the system of the Self interpreted as dialogical. The second step was re-reading the text to make interpretative inferences about those cues by taking into account the context of the discourse. As follows, we will report the analysis of the excerpts that allow to exemplify the presence and transformation of the three voices along the participation in the blended learning experienc- es, and to discuss our conceptualization of 'Self Democratic Expression'.

## 4. From powerful teachers to democratic students

In the first focus group discussions taking place at the beginning of one of the courses the students report two interconnected aspects, which are the reference to both actual and potential positions and the relevance of a wide space-time dimension. Let us start with Excerpt 1 to grasp some interesting discursive aspects and, in turn, some psychological dynamics about power relationships among voices.

Excerpt 1

| | |
|---|---|
| Mimino | *eh the criticism seems a foregone sentence (.) there is a lot of knowledge and few skills* |
| Researcher | *m* |
| Mimino | *h* |
| Researcher | *so the problem is (.) I may have learned to recognize a psychopathology but I have not the foggiest idea of how to deal with it, but I can know (.) everything about some topics concerning working psychology (.) but I can't do a proper analysis or apply a strategy to solve them (0.2) there are many contents, a lot of them, perhaps too many, and so (a school drop-out) sense arises Are you referring to the University course you have attended?* |
| Mimino | *no, in general this is a criticism that I do to the overall University because actually I had few experiences in other courses, so it's about this one (0.5), but also talking with others, in short, there is much debate about how useful the University is to get a job, I'm not saying that knowledge is less important than competence because °otherwise we would be blind without knowledge°* |
| Researcher | *you're saying that knowledge and know-how have to be integrated* |
| Mimino | *mh: they have to be integrated, the point is that to do so there should be a different approach* |

In this excerpt, we detect multiple references to elements related to the Self. First, by referring to the content learnt during an exam ("I have learned to recognize a psychopathology") and to a specific university course ("Some topics concerning working psychology"), Mimino reflects on the opportunities that the "university system" has given to him for his personal development, and the one of his peers. The image of the Self that emerges from the text is that of students that accumulate some knowledge, but do not feel prepared for applying such knowledge in authentic contexts. Through the expression "But also talking to the others in short there is much debate about how useful the university is to work," he implies not only the voice of his peers, but also the voice of the public opinion. By putting in the discourse all these voices, he positions himself through an evaluating process. An elaborate scenario of positions (passive, knowl- edgeable and not-competent students) and power relationships is depicted by voicing learning activities, other exams, the system, and other people involved in this system. At the same time, he expresses a critical evaluation about these positions and describes the system as an entity that would need a "different approach." The discourse introduced by Mimino in this excerpt is then continued and supported by the other students and be- comes the textual tool to create, at an interactional level, a collective posi- tion. By using personal pronouns, supporting each other, and quoting some university teachers' voice, they seem to embody a group characterized by opposition against the given system. That is to say, students embody a kind of Menippean-We-Position, useful to struggle against the voice of the University system. Individual voices disappear and a collective position criticizing the third voice of the system and the first voice of traditional teachers comes out.

In the following of the interview, from the student's talk it is possible to identify new positions, perceived as potential by students in relation to the new blended experience. Indeed, a set of new possible positions is imagined, as students are asked to describe how they imagine themselves within the blended course that they have started to attend. The students refer to expected positions projected in the future, especially regarding the blended course and possible working places. They are characterized by change and transformation and students perceive that they can be criti- cal, practical, collaborative, spontaneous, and active during the blended course. In excerpt 2, students are answering the question "How will your learning strategies be, during the blended course?"

Excerpt 2

| | |
|---|---|
| Teresiana | *It changes because to me we are driven to express our opinions about what we study (.) we are auto- matically forced to reprocess them, so incorpo- rating those concepts.* |

One interesting aspect is the use of the implicit personal pronoun ‘we’ and the possessive adjective ‘our’, which gives evidence of the reference to a collective character. As revealed by other sections in the conversation, students tend to voice a group positioning as they talk about the new learn- ing strategies in the blended course. Another important characteristic is the presence of the teacher’s voice as well, so a weaving of voices comes out in Excerpt 2. Indeed, there is Teresiana’s own voice (“It changes because to me”), the voice of a We that is taking shape (“We are driven to express our opinions;” “about what We study;” “We are automatically forced”), and the teacher’s voice, who forces students to use a specific learning method. Therefore, on one hand, Teresiana positions the students as still passive in respect to the teacher (the instructor “forces” them to adopt some learning modalities) but, on the other, she describes them as changing (“It changes”) and getting active students, who can develop their own ideas and express their voices. In this section of the discussion, the repertoire of I-positions narrated by students is characterized by the external positions (“You as an involving teacher;” “You as a nagging teacher;” and “You as potentially collaborative students”).

Synthetically, in relation to their previous experience at the university, the repertoire of the Self is characterized by a number of actual positions, where students define themselves as independent, traditional, and passive learners. These internal positions are in relation with the external ones of teachers, activities, and artifacts, such as “You as traditional teachers,” “You as books with specific characteristics,” and “You as the authors of the books.” This plethora of voices is put up by students to realize a process of evaluation about their actual internal and external positions. Indeed, they express their negative judgment and their disappointment about the traditional way of being students (characterized by the use of books, syn- thesis, and aloud repetitions). In this process of Self-definition and evalu- ation, a sort of comparison between actual and ideal positions appears. What students would like to be (active and protagonist students) clashes with their real positions. The observation of the power relationship occur- ring between internal and external positions reveals that the way students position themselves is guided by external requirements that, in bakhtinian terms, represent the third Magistral voice (the learning system’s voice) de- termining what is right or not. This aspect is especially represented when students spontaneously start talking about their identity as learners strug- gling against the university system. They define themselves as students in trouble and angry because of the university system, which expects them to be traditional and passive. The second voice (the student’s one) seems to recognize the influence of the third voice (the one of the system) repre- sented by the first voice (the teachers and the executive secretaries’ voice). However, even if the second voice defines its own passive and traditional positions as negative ones, it implicitly accepts and legitimates the power and the authority of the third voice in this process of students positioning definition. Therefore, students recognize the authority of the third voice

and the role of the first one. On one hand, they criticize these roles but, on the other, they tend to legitimate them.

At the end of the course, again, actual and potential positions emerge from the students' narration. Students speak about themselves as individu- al, independent, collaborative, active, and critical learners. These are all ex- perienced and existing positions in the students' repertoires, but are related to different experiences. Indeed, learners define themselves as independent and traditional when they are involved in other university courses; whereas they characterize themselves as active, practical, and collaborative in rela- tion to the blended course. In Excerpt 3, Chiaretta enters in the discursive flow concerning the question "How do you usually study?"

Excerpt 3

| | |
|---|---|
| Chiaretta | *I didn't change a lot my study method either >so<: also because at the end the course (.) was struc- tured in a way that it was a course just between us, that is, we studied all together in practice (.) eh in the University reality there are no mo- ments when we can study all together and >at most it's just between two or three people< at most we exchange >you know< notes or something but (h) [there is not a* |

In excerpt 3, by using the word "either" Chiaretta connects her utter- ance to the other students' voices ("I didn't change a lot my study method either"). In her narrative, three voices are involved: her own voice repre- senting the "I as a not changed student," the group's voice representing the "We as collaborative students," and another group's voice representing the "We as a small group prevented to collaborate." Furthermore, the position of "We as collaborative students" entails a sense of familiarity, confidence, and being attached to each other, which is suggested by the expression "It was just between us." Whereas, the "We as a small group prevented to col- laborate" is characterized by a sense of coolness and the idea that students cannot do their best within other learning contexts. In relation to these two positions, Chiaretta explicitly refers to the dissimilarities between the blended course and the university context. Two components are interesting here: the description of the blended course, which "was structured" and the use of the verb "can" in the sentence "there are no moments when we can study all together." Indeed, the use of these two verbs (to be structured and can) implies the reference to at least two voices. They are the voice of the teacher who organized the blended course and the voice of other teachers (but also of the other people involved in the university system) who require learning strategies different from the collaborative one. These verbs allow us to recognize different power relationships, on the one hand, between the students and the blended course's teacher and, on the other hand, between the students and the other teachers. Indeed, through the

verb “can” (used here with the meaning ‘to be allowed to do something’), Chiaretta recognizes the other teachers’ power of defining the students’ learning strategies and, in some way, their own positions as learners. The same power is expressed for the blended course teacher, but a different role is associated to her, since she is portrayed as the teacher who structures the learning activities more than the learning strategies and supports the group formation instead of the individual learning. In short, the university system implies several voices (teachers, activities, and executive secretaries’ voices) which are different from the ones experienced within the blended course.

Chiaretta’s positions are narrated by other students as well and, in the following fragment (Excerpt 4), the connecting role of the blended Self positions is described by Miriana.

Excerpt 4

| | |
|---|---|
| Miriana | in my opinion this kind of approach is useful [for the working world |
| Researcher | how come?] |
| Miriana | *that is against the individualism that <I say that so to speak because at the end< it is about individualism, that is if we study (.) at our home on a book (.) and we go to take the exam (.) that is then >it’s even worse< there is noth- ing left (.) we have done an individual job (.) while this collective job is useful because if we will have to work in team one day* |

As in the previous excerpt, she opposes the blended course to the other university classes, but she even creates a link between the learning experi- ence and the future working places. Interestingly, Miriana’s utterance im- plies all the voices that were already described in relation with the previ- ous excerpt, but introduces an ethical voice as well, concerning the ethic implications of learning. When Miriana speaks about individualism, she characterizes the other teachers and their requirements as individualistic people and, on the contrary, the blended approach as a useful possibility to face such an individualism and to be equipped for the requests of the working world. Once again, a clash between the voice of the traditional learning and the second voice of the students occurs; however, on the one hand, the role of the teacher is still recognized as the organizer and the provider of the learning activities. That is to say, the power of the teacher is taken for granted as the teacher decides aims, tools and modalities of learning. In this sense, we can say that students approach learning criticiz- ing the role of teachers and the functioning of the university system, and their own Self structure changes in relation with this new perception of power relationships.

## 5. Discussion and conclusions

In this article, we have conceptualized the democratic aspects of the Self based on the Bakhtinian theory of Magistral, Socratic and Menip- pean dialogues, and on Herman's conceptualization of the dialogical self. Using these theoretical resources, we have examined some excerpts from students' interviews discussing how the emergent structure of the Self was related to power relations between voices. Our analysis shows that using this framework it is possible to identify how the students position them- selves in relation to learning activities, institutions and teachers and how different power relations are enacted in the expression of their identity positions. In the data that we have analysed, the dynamics of the dialogi- cal Self reveal that introducing novel approaches to learning allowed the students to reorganize their Self to some degree, and that this implies also a shift in power relations between the voices that were expressed, even though we were not able to demonstrate that more democratic Selves were produced from the blended nature of the course.

In particular, by analyzing the discussions, we found that the Magis- tral dialogue is associated to previous and traditional learning experiences, during which students are required to be accommodating with the teach- ers' requirements and to study independently from other students. In turn, these teachers' voices reflect the third cultural voice, which belongs to the university system characterized by absence of collaboration, unidirectional relationships, authority of professors, centrality of power, and traditional tools for teaching and studying (e.g. paper books, lecture rooms, Magistral lectures, and so on). Therefore, the Magistral dialogues is represented by the third voice of the university system and the first voice of teachers and administrative representatives, leading the students to position themselves as traditional and passive learners.

On the opposite, the Menippean dialogue is related to the blended course organized by following the BCCP model, which allows students to position themselves as more collaborative, active, and able to self-define— to some degree—their own learning activities. Namely, we discussed that the Menippean dialogue is related to the critique and opposition against the university system and is linked with a sense of 'We' created during the course. This last collective position is just narrated at the beginning of the course, whereas is also enacted at the interactional level at the end. So, we claim that a Menippean dialogue can be characterized by a double nature (at least in the learning contexts analyzed). There is the dimension of criticizing and struggling against the third voice of a culture perceived as unfair and unacceptable. Such a struggle often works as a tool to think about the Self structure, to define and to re-shape it. The second dimension of the Menippean dialogue is the collaboration among the students' voices and the formation of a We-position, which is at first useful to face the third voice and later it mediates an active and critical learning experience, and a new personal way of being. In this sense, the formation of a Menippean

dialogue is related to the transformation of the dialogical structure of the Self and, in turn, of the context it is related to. In this sense, to some degree the learning experience seems to facilitate the development of the Self, and the sustainable process of co-constructed knowledge and democratic ex- pression of the Self voices. In such a re-organization, the role of the teacher is still crucial for the emergence of a Menippean (and so, democratic and sustainable) approach.

In conclusion, the picture that emerges from this research is that the re-organization of the structure of the students' Self is related, according to the perception of the participants, to the specific blended learning course, which seems to support the formation of relationships and the distribution of power among the three voices that can be defined as more democratic. However, our analysis is very limited in its scope and does not allow us to fully discuss the relationship between the learning experience and the development of the students' Selves. On the contrary, we have exemplified how Bakhtin's and Herman's concepts allow to identify the re-structuring of the Self in respect of power relations, and thus to potentially grasp how a democratic expression of the Self can emerge from different learning ex- periences. Further studies could address this issue in order to explain the impact that blended (or online) educational activities might have for the education of democratic citizens.

## References


Adams, G, & Markus, H. R. (2001), "Culture as Patterns: an Alternative Approach to the Problem of Reification", in *Culture & Psychology*, vol. 7, n. 3, pp. 283- 296.

Bakhtin, M.M. (1984), *Problems of Dostoevsky's Poetics*, Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press.

Id. (1986), *Speech Genres and Other Late Essays*, Austin, TX: University of Texas Press.

Bruner, J.S. (1986), *Actual Minds, Possible Worlds*, Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.

Id. (1996), *The Culture of Education*, Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.

Cheyne, J.A., & Tarulli, D. (1999), "Dialogue, Difference and Voice in the Zone of Proximal Development", in *Theory & Psychology*, vol. 9, n. 1, pp. 5-28.

Council of the European Union (2014), "Council Conclusions on Participatory Governance of Cultural Heritage", in *Official Journal of the European Union*, http://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/HTML/?uri=CELEX:-52014XG1223(01)&from=EN, accessed March 23, 2017.

Garvey, A., & Fogel, A. (2007), "Dialogical Change Processes, Emotions, and the Early Emergence of Self", in *International Journal for Dialogical Science*, vol. 2, n. 1, pp. 51-76.

Hermans, H.J.M. (2001), "The Construction of a Personal Position Repertoire: Method and Practice", in *Culture & Psychology*, vol. 7, n. 3, pp. 323-365.

Id. (2002), "The Dialogical Self as a Society of Mind", in *Theory & Psychology*, vol. 12, n. 2, pp. 147-160.

Hermans, H.J.M., & Kempen, H.J.G. (1993), *The Dialogical Self: Meaning as Movement*, San Diego: Academic Press.

James, W. (1890), *The Principles of Psychology*, London: Macmillan.

Jauss, H.J. (1989), *Question and Answer: Forms of Dialogical Understanding*, Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press.

Koschamnn, T.D. (1999), "Toward a Dialogic Theory of Learning: Bakhtin's Contribution to Understanding Learning in Settings of Collaboration", in C.M. Hoadley, & J. Roschelle (eds.), *Proceeding of the CSCL 99 Conference*, Mahwah: Lawrence Erlbaum, pp. 308-313.

Ligorio, M.B. (2011), "The Dialogical Self and Educational Research: A Fruitful Relationship", in H. Hermans, & T. Gieser (eds.), *Handbook of the Dialogi- cal Self*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, pp. 849-965.

Ligorio, M.B., & Cucchiara, S. (2011), "Blended Collaborative Constructive Participation (BCCP): A model for Teaching in Higher Education", in *eLearningPapers*, 27th issue, https://www.openeducationeuropa.eu/en/article/ Blended-Collaborative-Constructive-Participation-%28BCCP%29%3A--A- model-for-teaching-in-higher-education--, accessed March 23, 2017.

Ligorio, M.B., Loperfido, F.F., & Sansone, N. (2013), "Dialogical Positions as a Method of Understanding Identity Trajectories in a Collaborative Blended University Course", in *Computer-Supported Collaborative Learning*, vol. 8, n. 3, pp 351-367.

Lyotard, J.F. (1984), *The Postmodern Condition: A Report on Knowledge*, Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press.

Renshaw, P.D. (2004), "Dialogic Learning, Teaching and Instruction. Theoretical Roots and Analytical Frameworks", in J. van der Linden, & Peter Renshaw (eds.), *Dialogic Learning. Shifting Perspectives to Learning, Instruction, and Teaching*, Dordrecht: Springer Netherlands, pp. 1-15.

Scardamalia, M. (2002), "Collective Cognitive Responsibility for the Advancement of Knowledge", in B. Smith (ed.), *Liberal Education in a Knowledge Society*, Chicago: Open Court, pp. 67-98.

Scardamalia, M., & Bereiter, C. (2006), "Knowledge Building: Theory, Pedagogy, and Technology", in K. Sawyer (ed.), *Cambridge Handbook of the Learning Sciences*, New York: Cambridge University Press, pp. 97-118.

Vygotsky, L.S. (1978), *Mind in Society: the Development of Higher Psychological Processes*, Cambridge: Harvard University Press.

Wegerif, R. (2006), "A Dialogic Understanding of the Relationship between CSCL and Teaching Thinking Skills", in *International Journal of Computer-Sup- ported Collaborative Learning*, vol. 1, pp. 143-157.

Wortham, S. (2001), *Narratives in Action. A Strategy for Research and Analysis*, New York: Teachers College Press.